Scenery & Recreation Specialist Report
Burnt Corral Vegetation Management Project
Kaibab National Forest, North Kaibab Ranger District

Introduction

The Burnt Corral Vegetation Management Project proposes to treat approximately 28,090 acres, mostly within ponderosa pine, on the North Kaibab Ranger District (NKRD) of the Kaibab National Forest (KNF), through a combination of mechanical thinning and wildland fire treatments. Recreation in the project area is varied and is often dictated by season and weather. Visually within the project area, where recreation opportunity (such as camping, hunting, and hiking exists), there has not been large scale manipulation or influence (man-made) on the scenic value. However, the 1996 Bridger Knoll fire did affect approximately 10,200 acres within the lower, western portion of the project area; the result was stand replacement regarding Ponderosa pine within this area, with new vegetation regrowth dominated by New Mexico locust, scrub oak, some remaining (post-fire) Ponderosa pine stringers and young plantation plots. Recreation opportunities, existing conditions, and mitigation measures have been described in the body of this report, utilizing the Forest Plan[1] as the guiding document.

Recreation management decisions on the Kaibab NF are guided by three primary approaches. These approaches are aimed at providing managers a more complete framework for considering management actions. Their purpose is to minimize new development in remote settings and to protect and manage both low and high use areas and facilities. These approaches guide actions in response to changing or increasing use.

1. **Provide a range of recreation opportunities**. Manage in a way that maximizes the opportunities available to all types of recreationists to the degree allowed by this plan and other agency regulations.
2. **Concentrate use at specific sites or locations rather than dispersing use within the area or to other areas**. In keeping with the principles of recreation ecology, this approach would assure that impacts associated with recreational use are constrained to particular areas.
3. **Minimize the extent to which forest management actions disperse use from high to low use areas**. This would help accomplish the goal of constraining the number and size of areas impacted by recreational use where possible.

The ultimate goal of these approaches is to maintain the visitors' perceived freedom to recreate how and where they choose, while retaining healthy, sustainable public lands. When impact and user capacity questions arise, indicators and standards to determine how and where to allocate visitor use should be employed. These approaches would not preclude the Kaibab NF from

[1] USDA Forest Service - *Land and Resource Management Plan for the Kaibab National Forest* (February 2014, as amended).

developing new sites or adapting old sites to accommodate new uses, provided appropriate analyses are conducted to make those decisions.

Forest Plan Direction (see Forest Plan, pp 62-67)

A. Desired Conditions for Recreation and Scenery[2]

1) A wide spectrum of high-quality recreation
2) Recreation management activities complement and support local economies and tourism.
3) User conflicts are infrequent.
4) Recreation settings retain high to moderate scenic quality.
5) Users have low to occasional contact with other visitors and FS personnel

B. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIO) (See Forest Plan, pg. 116; Figure 10 – pg. 121, & Figure 11 – pg. 122)

Recreation suitability on the Kaibab NF corresponds to the recreation opportunity spectrum (**ROS**) and scenery management system scenic integrity objectives (**SIO**). ROS is based on the premise that visitors choose specific settings for their recreation activities in order to enjoy the desired experiences. The ROS is used by the Forest Service to provide a framework for defining classes of outdoor recreation environments, activities and experience opportunities.

The settings, activities and opportunities for recreation experiences have been divided into six classes: primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized, semi-primitive motorized, roaded natural (roaded modified is a sub-class) rural and urban. Opportunities for experiences along the spectrum represent a range from very high probability of solitude, self-reliance, challenge and risk, to a very social experience where self-reliance, challenge and risk are relatively unimportant.

The ROS classes and SIO levels indicate the desired conditions for the Kaibab NF landscape. The existing ROS and SIO may not currently meet these desired conditions, but projects are designed to maintain or improve these to meet the desired conditions.

1. ROS Prescription:

All 28,090 acres within the Burnt Corral Vegetation Management Project area fall into the Roaded Natural (RN) class guidelines[3] (see figure 1 – next page). Within the RN class landscapes are carefully managed to maintain or enhance recreation and scenic values, sites and features. RN areas are managed to be natural-appearing, changes to natural vegetation patterns may be evident but are in harmony with the natural setting.

[2]Kaibab National Forest Recreation Opportunity Settings and Scenery Management Guidebook" (USDA 2004)

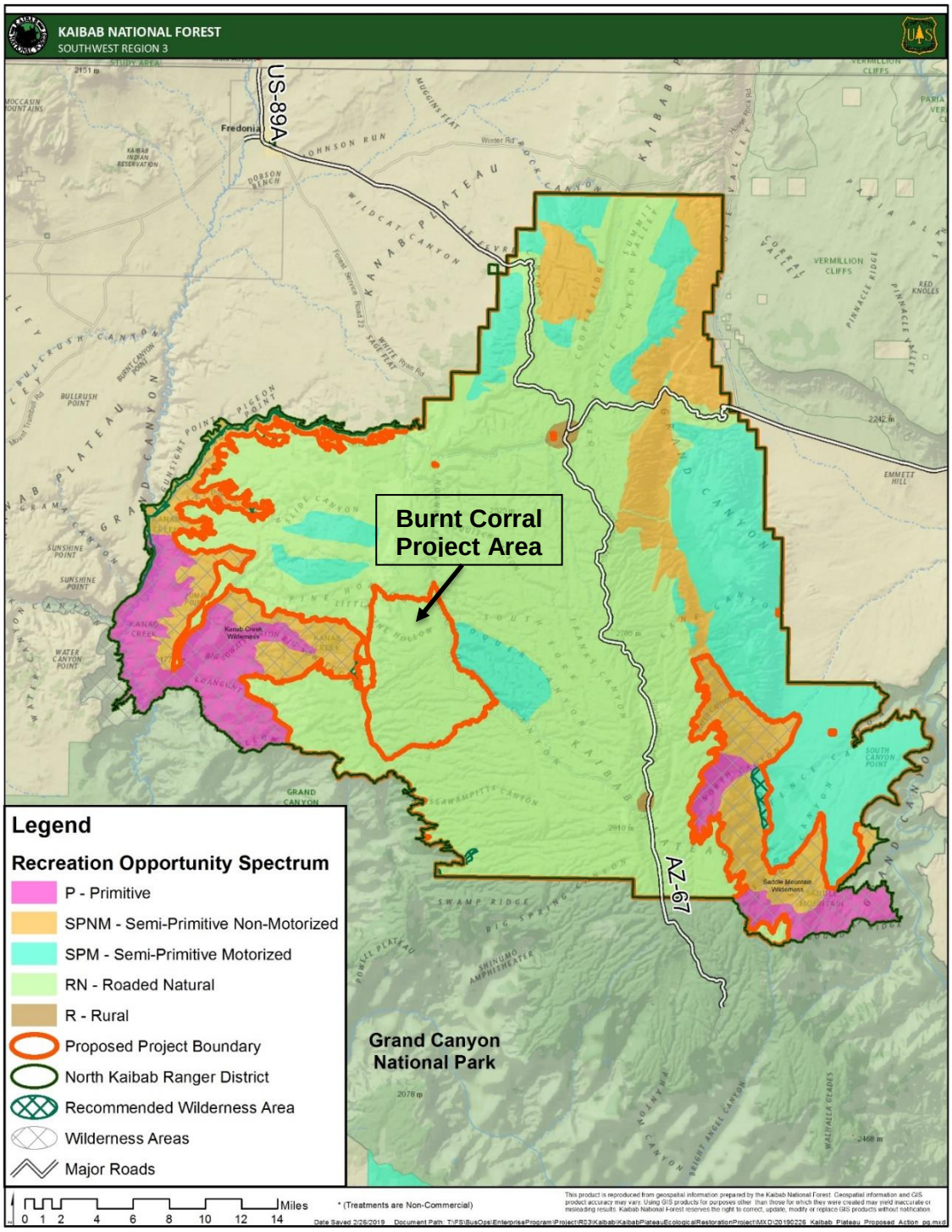

Figure 1. North Kaibab Ranger District Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Map.

Landscapes within the RN class should expect alterations to the landscape to be subtle to the average forest visitor, and are executed in such a way that recreation and scenic values are maintained or enhanced. Although activities may be noticeable during project activities, project design and/or mitigation measures may be developed to limit the extent and duration of disturbances during and after project implementation to meet ROS standards and guidelines.

Table 1—Kaibab National Forest ROS and Resource Activities Compatibility

ROS / Resource Management	Primitive, Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized-Wilderness (P-W-SPNM-W)	Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM)	Semi-Primitive Motorized (SNM)	Roaded Natural (RN)	Roaded Modified (RM)	Rural (RURAL)
Recreation Management	Restricted. According to Wilderness Act and Agency Regulations. Use low. Wilderness-dependent uses favored. Non-motorized non-mechanized opportunities	Restricted. Limited developments, low use levels, non-motorized recreation opportunities on trails or by cross-country travel	Restricted Limited developments, low use levels, Variety of non-motorized, and motorized recreation opportunities on designated routes.	Consistent. Moderately developed recreation sites, Moderate to high use, variety of non-motorized and motorized recreation opportunities	Consistent. Limited developments, low to moderate use levels, variety of non-motorized and motorized recreation opportunities	Consistent. Highly developed recreation sites, High use, variety of non-motorized and motorized recreation opportunities
Vegetation Management	Incompatible. According to Act and Agency Regulations	Restricted. Special Analysis Required.	Restricted. Special Analysis Required.	Consistent. May require mitigation in sensitive areas.	Consistent. May require some mitigation in sensitive areas.	Consistent. May require mitigation in sensitive areas.
Fire/Fuels Management	Restricted. According to Act and Agency Regulations	Consistent. Mitigations may be required.	Consistent. Mitigations may be required in sensitive areas.	Consistent. Mitigations may be required in sensitive areas.	Consistent.	Consistent. Mitigations may be required in sensitive areas.

Prescribed fires (both planned and unplanned ignition) are compatible in this setting. Recurring maintenance burning is also compatible to this setting. Care should be taken when planning and constructing control lines so that unnecessary public and non-project motorized vehicle use is minimized and continued use is not encouraged or established. Restore control lines to a near undisturbed condition in foregrounds of sensitive roads, trails, and developed recreation sites. Take measures to hasten recovery and rehabilitate control lines, such as re-contouring of berms, pulling material and rocks across line, disguising entrances to eliminate unnecessary vehicle access, etc.

Mechanical vegetation treatment areas will require avoidance and signage within timber harvest areas for safety to the public. For timber harvest areas a separation for other recreational use areas (i.e., dispersed camping and hiking/hunting) should de designed and implemented in such a way that they maintain or enhance desired recreational and scenic values in areas with scenic foreground. Treatments will be designed consistent with the corresponding SIO direction. Departures from standard RN/SIO direction for high priority critical treatments may be considered as described above under Exceptions. Shape, blend and orient treatment units in a manner that is natural appearing and will not draw the attention of an average forest visitor

when the project is completed. See corresponding SIO standards and guidelines. Stumps should be cut as low as possible (generally less than 6" or as low as possible on larger diameter trees) in seen areas of sensitive travel corridor foregrounds. Low stump heights are preferred throughout the RN class, however, stumps may be cut to 8" or as low as possible outside of sensitive travel corridor foregrounds. Leaving untreated slash or crushing slash without follow up treatment are considered incompatible with this setting. Slash treatment should generally be completed within 1 year in areas adjacent to and visible from developed recreation sites, private homes, Forest Service system trails and sensitive roads, and 2 years in rest of class, consistent with the corresponding SIO direction, unless a decision has been made to temporarily change the area's SIO or extend treatment timelines.

Some well-established, popular dispersed campsites or concentrated use areas may be identified for protection from disturbance during treatments, or for restoration when the project is completed.

Avoid establishing personal use or commercial fuelwood areas in foregrounds of sensitive travel corridors in RN areas. Generally restrict fuelwood cutting within the first 100' for sensitive travel corridors. Reasons for making exceptions would include treatments that would assist recovering an area to assigned ROS/SIO condition. Making slash and cordwood available to recreation visitors or residents may be considered to reduce amount of slash needing treatment. Consider mitigations to minimize short-term impacts to sensitive foregrounds, such as user-created roads from off-road travel, remaining slash and high stumps.

2. Scenic Integrity (SIO) Prescription:

All 28,090 acres described in the Proposed Action fall into SIO3, Moderate (slightly altered). The following table shows the compatibility of SMS and potential management activities:

Table 2 — Kaibab NF SIO and Resource Activities Compatibility

Management Activity	Level 1 – SI1 Very High	Level 2 – SI2 High	Level 3 – SI3 Moderate	Level 4 –SI4 Low
Recreation Management	Restricted. Development remains subordinate to surrounding landscape.	Consistent. Landscape character appears intact.	Consistent. Landscape appears slightly altered.	Consistent. Landscape appears moderately altered.
Vegetation Management	Incompatible - Wilderness Restricted – other special areas.	Consistent. Mitigations may be required.	Consistent. Mitigations may be required on sensitive corridors.	Consistent. Mitigations may be required on sensitive corridors.
Fire/Fuels Management	Restricted. Mitigations may be required.	Consistent. Mitigations may be required.	Consistent. Mitigations may be required on sensitive corridors.	Consistent. Mitigations may be required on sensitive corridors.

No new road construction is anticipated or needed, however, in the event that existing road surfaces are improved, then the road maintenance construction or overlay should assure size, shape, line, and color repeat the landscape character of the locale. Road reconstruction proposals will be reviewed for compatibility with SIO 3. Use native or natural-appearing materials for riprap, review slope stabilization materials with Landscape Architect prior to specifying. Try to balance cut and fill, if construction cut slopes or fill slopes are necessary, rehabilitate the slopes by roughing up the surface and seeding with native seeds, and mulching. Do not leave “eye brows” at the tops of cut slopes.

Construction of temporary roads may be necessary to achieve resource objectives. Temporary roads will be decommissioned when work is completed. Roads will be effectively closed at entrances/exit points, and surface will be scarified, seeded with native species and mulched to promote revegetation.

Fire is reintroduced as a part of the ecosystem and is managed in accordance with agency policy. Avoid constructing fire control lines that are geometric or produce so much contrast that they become noticeable to the casual observer. Take measures to hasten recovery and rehab control lines, such as re-contouring berms, pulling material and rocks across the line, and disguising entrances to eliminate vehicle access, etc. Maintenance burning is considered appropriate in this SIO.

Management activities move the existing vegetation toward the desired condition. Shape, blend and orient vegetation management to contours and desired vegetation patterns, and to blend with landscape characteristics. Do not introduce geometric shapes or high contrast changes in tree density, species or composition. Stumps in the foreground of sensitive travel corridors will be flush or low cut (less than 6", or as low as possible for larger diameter trees). Treat activity generated slash in the foreground, middle-ground, or background of sensitive travel corridors based on the Scenic Integrity Map. Mitigation measures will be developed on a project-by-project basis. In meadow treatments, slash should be treated in the foreground areas of sensitive travel corridors. In middle-ground and background areas, slash may be treated in the most economical manner, with follow up burning. Aspen are an important visual species; management activities will be decided on a case by case basis. Treat activity generated slash in the foreground, middle-ground, or background of sensitive travel corridors based on the Scenic Integrity Map. Leaving slash untreated, and just crushing slash are not considered compatible with foreground areas of sensitive travel corridors in SIO 3. Mitigation measures should be included in the appendices to the EA.

Alternatives

Alternative 1 – No Action

Proposed thinning and prescribed burning treatments would not occur under Alternative 1. Therefore the existing condition would remain. ROS of Roaded Natural and SMS rating of level 3-moderate would persist. Any direct and indirect effects of the no-action alternative on the recreation resource would be caused by increased tree density within the project area resulting in the continuation of the fuel loading and decrease in forest health. The increased likelihood

and severity of wildfires would affect the recreation experience in the areas they occur for a considerable length of time and could include closures, restrictions, loss of recreation opportunities. Conditions could deviate in the long term from ROS zone desired conditions.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

The proposed activity is mechanical vegetation treatments and prescribed fire. These activities will affect the foreground (within ¼ -½ mile of the viewer) landscape. Visitors will be affected by the treatments when they are taking place, as well as the blackening of the landscape from surface and understory burning will be visible. Effects at these proposed sites will have short term effects, and after new growth occurs, permittees and visitors will not notice the treatments.

Mitigation Measures

If a decision is made to temporarily drop the scenic integrity class one level, there may be a temporary negative effect on the ROS setting character. Describe the effects in project level analysis, consider developing mitigation measures to maintain ROS settings as close as possible to the mapped ROS, and to insure that at the completion of the project the area will meet the original ROS class and corresponding SIO.

If a decision is made to make an exception to standard ROS and SMS direction, consider developing interpretive displays to inform the public of project activities, general timelines, and expectations for final conditions.

As stated in the existing conditions, the Forest Service believes that the Burnt Corral proposal will have short term effects to recreation opportunities and possibly long term effects to scenery. These effects include a disruption to visitors use while the treatments are occurring; from smoke, equipment noise, road access, and scenic value, as well as the longer term visual effects such as charring, tree mortality, and the presence of constructed piles that might disrupt a visitor's experience. Every effort should be made to notify the public and permit holders prior to implementation of treatments, visitor contacts in the project vicinity should be made prior to initiating project work, and frequently during the implementation. Visitors should be afforded the opportunity to relocate their camping location within a reasonable amount of time, and contacts should be made systematically, and in a professional and sensitive manner. Roads should remain open to the public, with pilot cars and shuttles utilized as needed during fire activity. Efforts will be made to ensure treatment activities do not directly impact and interfere with permitted recreation events or other planned recreation activities. The visual impacts from logging and fire operations should be minimized through rehabilitation as needed within one year, including the removal of log decks, temporary skid roads, hand lines, or other access points and staging areas. The placement of piles or other vegetative materials should be determined with visual retention in mind and should not impact the public's access to dispersed camping opportunities.

- All treatment activities along Forest Service Road 425 (FSR425) will be coordinated in an effort to minimize negative impacts to the public. This road allows access to Indian Hollow, the Bill Hall trailhead, and Crazy Jug Point. In the event that treatments must overlap with a permitted recreation activity coordination must occur to ensure that the terms of the special use permit are complied with regarding the FS terms and conditions.

- All constructed control lines, dozer lines, and temporary skid roads in the FR425 view shed, both hand and mechanical, should be constructed in a way that they do not encourage social use or interfere with public access, and that they may be readily rehabilitated upon completion of the activity for which they were created.
- Construction of piles and disposal of slash in the FR425 view shed shall be minimal and dispersed. Piles and decks should be short term (1-2 years) and then removed as prescribed.
- Any activity performed along the FSR425 view shed where parking and staging of equipment or vehicles for periods greater than one shift should be coordinated in an effort to reduce impacts to the public.
- During fire activity where smoke is visible from the roads surrounding the project area an effort will be made to ensure adequate visitor contacts are maintained and road guards are established in priority locations.
- Monitoring of the view shed in the treatment area shall be performed as project phases are initiated and completed.

Cumulative Effects

There is a known effect to the public where the SI level will be degraded for a short period of time from Moderate to Low-moderate. This action is acceptable to accomplish large scale restoration where the outcome in the future is for an improved SI overall by restoring the landscape to the Forest Services' desired condition (as described in the Forest Plan).

Conclusion

Although the proposed action treatments would likely have the effect of displacing users, restricting access, loss of opportunities to pursue recreational activities or changes to the ROS Class; these impacts would be short term, relatively small in size, and limited to those places within the project area being actively implemented. The nature of proposed activities and inclusion of design features limit the intensity and duration of likely effects on the recreation resource. In contrast, the increased likelihood and severity of wildfires associated with the no-action alternative could affect the recreation experience in the areas for decades where wildfires occur at a higher severity and could include closures, restrictions, and loss of recreation opportunities.

Draft Report Submitted via. E-mail to D. Vincelette by: Melissa Robinson May, 21, 2018
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Report updated by: David Vincelette / KNF-NKRD NEPA Coordinator Dec. 10, 2019

References:

U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Kaibab National Forest (USDA 2014). *Land and Resource Management Plan for the Kaibab National Forest* (February 2014, as amended).

U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Kaibab National Forest (USDA 2004). Kaibab National Forest Recreation Opportunity Spectrum and Scenery Management System Guidebook.